

ON THE HORIZON

WHAT HAPPENED TO ABRAMOVICH?

Leafing Through Volume "A" of the New Soviet Encyclopedia

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THERE is no insight into a nation's way of thought like a copy of its chief work of reference. Equipped only with a ruler—to measure the lengths of articles—we may discover what is considered important and what barely worthy of mention, what great thinker is now considered a fool, and what fool a great thinker. We are led to mysteries, and, pondering them, may uncover insights.

So musing, one takes one's ruler in hand and approaches the first volume, "A," of the second edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia. The first edition was published twenty-five years ago, in 1926; that a great deal has happened in Russia in the meantime is a truth testified to immediately by the absence of the names of all the original editors from the new masthead. I turned to the section of the encyclopedia dealing with noteworthy individuals of the name "Abramovich." In the first edition, I recalled, Sholom Jacob Abramovich, better known to literature under his *nom de plume* Mendele Mocher Seforim, had been given a lengthy article, as befitted the father of Yiddish literature. But my ruler now hung helpless in my hand—not a line. The full two columns of the first edition of 1926 had disappeared without a trace.

Indeed, the tribe of famous Abramoviches in general seemed to have succumbed to some literary plague: writers, artists, scientists, famous revolutionists—all had disappeared. My friend Raphael Abramovich, once the leader of the Jewish Bund and the Russian Social Democratic party, and now resident in this

country, was at least considered worthy of a full-length attack by Bukharin and his fellow editors of the first edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia. He has disappeared from the second. One Abramovich, whom the old editorial board had paradoxically chosen to ignore, remains to represent all other bearers of that name in the new edition—Abramovich, Vsevelod Mikhailovich, an early flier who comes from Caucasian Georgia, Stalin's homeland. He is the grandson of Abramovich-Mendele, but, as it happens, he is also the son of a man who converted to Christianity.

Abramovich is not the only name to be affected by the editorial changes in the Soviet Encyclopedia. Jewish names in general no longer seem to be quite *de rigueur* among Soviet citizens and famous Russians, if they wish to be entered in the encyclopedia. The lifelong comrade of Raphael Abramovich in the Bund, Aizenshtadt-Yudin, also worth a full vituperative attack in the first edition, has disappeared. (Fellow socialists of Christian origin seem to have been spared: Nikolas D. Avksentiev, who died in the United States in 1943, is amiably referred to as "an agent of the Imperialist Allies" who "organized counter-revolutionary uprisings.") The short-story writer D. I. Aizman, the critic and writer I. A. Aichenwald, the critic Jacob W. Abramov—all these are gone.

But no hostile critic should leap to the conclusion that Russian Jews have been eliminated from the Soviet Encyclopedia; the editors have been careful to include a small sampling: the two Axelrods—Paul B. and L. Orthodox—who were active in the fight against czarism, and fortunately did not live to be purged with their comrades in later

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days, and a Dr. Averbuch, a Moscow eye specialist.

PERHAPS, after all, the editors did away with Mendele because they just did not have the room to deal with all of Russia's new-found cultural glories. The editors of the first edition, it seems, had ignored Kunabayev Abay (1845-1904) from Kazakstan, and Khachatur Abovan (1805-1840) from Armenia—both have now been given their full due, and are honored with full-page color portraits, as well as long articles. Then, too, room was needed for Semion N. Aksionov (1784-1853), "a Russian guitarist who introduced a new style in the technique of guitar playing," and for Amurzayev, "a poet who eulogized the Stalin Five-Year Plans" in the native tongue of the Karafalkatsk province.

If the Abramoviches have been banished with scarcely a trace, the Adlers remain—as horrible examples of what people are capable of outside the sacred borders of the Soviet Union. Alfred Adler was described rather objectively in the 1926 edition of the encyclopedia as "the author of an original school of modern psychology . . . the school of so-called Individualist psychology," and the article continued with a résumé of his teachings. All this turns out to have been a serious error. The entry now reads *in toto*: "A reactionary Viennese psychopathologist, an Idealist and a pupil of Sigmund Freud." Presumably it is too dangerous now for an encyclopedia even to report Adler's theory that the power motive is the dominant one in human behavior.

The distinguished Austrian Socialist leader Victor Adler (1852-1916) was the subject of a long article by Karl Radek in the 1926 edition. Two scurrilous paragraphs are now considered adequate. Of his son, Friedrich Adler, who assassinated the prime minister of Austria-Hungary in 1916 for his role in starting the First World War, the new encyclopedia reports: "The leader of the Right Socialists, the most bitter enemy of the revolutionary labor movement, an agent of American imperialism, who had, at the same time, infected the working class of Austria with the poison of 'cosmopolitanism.'"

Russians nurtured on the first edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia will discover

that, in twenty-five years, not only have a host of Abramoviches vanished from living memory, but the history of the world in general has been transformed. Indeed, most of its history before 1917 has simply disappeared. Nor is it only relatively minor figures, like Uriel Acosta, the Jewish rationalist philosopher of the 17th century, who have been eliminated. Ideas that have played a leading role in history have also been snipped out of the record. "Absolute Rights," which received extensive and fairly objective treatment in the first edition of the encyclopedia, has been eliminated completely. Gone, too, is "Academic Freedom." "Absolutism" was defined in the 1926 edition as "autocracy, unlimited political power, one-man rule." This provocative definition has been revised to read: "Absolutism is a form of government in which all power belongs to the emperor, the king, the czar. . . ."

The "Agrarian Problem" was considered to be worth a 100-page article in the 1926 edition; agrarian history in ancient, medieval, and modern times was reviewed. In the new edition, the space has been cut one-third, and the reduced article is devoted almost entirely to the agrarian programs of the Social Democrats and Bolsheviks in Lenin's time, and to the Soviet collectivizations that have brought Russia's millions "so much joy and happiness." The age-old struggle of Russian peasants against serfdom and the landed gentry is passed over as if it had never been.

TRULY, as the editors of the encyclopedia write in their introduction, "Soviet culture has ranged higher than the culture of the capitalist countries." For Russian culture before 1917 is now illuminated by the glow of retrospective discovery. "The further evolution of the theoretical ideas [on aviation by Leonardo da Vinci] and their practical application were accomplished by Russians." Not Vasco da Gama but Apanasi Nikitin opened the sea route to India. And so it goes, on and on—until the third edition will no doubt open a new chapter in this fascinating serial. Who knows? Perhaps we will even meet some of our lost Abramoviches once again, springing fully formed from the ear of a (new) Soviet editor.